



P R E S S R E L E A S E

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FENTANYL: THE FASTEST-GROWING DRIVER OF OVERDOSES IN THE U.S. FINDS SHASTA COUNTY

SHASTA COUNTY – The fentanyl epidemic that has plagued the country’s larger urban cities for the past few years has reached Shasta County, causing an increase in local fentanyl-related overdoses and deaths.

In all of 2020, there were seven deaths due to fentanyl in Shasta County. By mid-June 2021, 11 deaths had already been reported. If this pace continues, Shasta County could see more than three times the number of deaths this year from fentanyl when compared to 2020.

Nationally, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported a record number of drug overdose deaths for 2020—more than 93,000 overdose deaths, much of it driven by the synthetic opioid fentanyl. The agency’s [latest data](#) show that 28 states had more than a 30 percent increase in overdose deaths in 2020 compared to 2019. In 10 states, the increase was more than 40 percent.

Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid (pain killer) that is similar to morphine but up to 100 times more potent. Fentanyl binds to the body’s opioid receptors in the brain, which control pain and emotions. The brain adapts to the drug, diminishing a person’s sensitivity and making it difficult to feel pleasure from anything besides the drug. People become addicted, and drug-seeking behaviors can take over their lives.

Illicit fentanyl is often pressed into counterfeit pills to mimic the look of prescription opioids. However, fentanyl is sold illegally in many forms, including powder, crystals and liquids that are delivered in combination with other substances. Most commonly, fentanyl is mixed in with other drugs, such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine.

“It is especially risky when people don’t know their drugs contain fentanyl. Many people are buying drugs and don’t realize they are purchasing fentanyl,” Karen Ramstrom, DO, MSPH, Shasta County Health Officer said. “This often results in new addictions or overdose.”

Earlier this month, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) issued a [public safety alert](#) about a sharp increase of fake prescription pills laced with fentanyl and

methamphetamine. This is the first such alert issued by the Drug Enforcement Administration in six years.

According to the DEA, more than 9.5 million counterfeit pills have been seized this year, more than the last two years combined. DEA lab tests revealed there has also been a dramatic rise in pills containing at least 2 milligrams of the drug, which is considered a lethal dose.



A lethal dose of fentanyl as compared to a penny.
—U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration

Local health officials want Shasta County community members to be aware of blue pills (some marked with “M” and “30”) that are being sold on the street and online (the dark web) as prescription opioid medication. These counterfeit pills most likely contain some amount of fentanyl. Fentanyl does not mix in evenly with other substances, and the potency and purity in one pill can vary. Simply breaking a pill in half does not mean that users will receive an evenly split dose.

Redding Police Department sees fentanyl overdoses often, and calls fentanyl “the next generation of drug use in Redding.” In addition to overdoses, police are seeing an increase in fentanyl-related emergencies and arrests.

Fentanyl is impossible to see, smell or taste. Without testing, no one can tell if your drugs are laced. Administrative Captain Brian Cole of the Redding Police Department says that people selling or using don’t know what they’re getting anymore. “Some people are seeking out fentanyl, but others are unaware that their drugs are laced or cut with it. It goes without saying, but you can’t trust your local drug dealer.”

It’s important for our community, especially parents, to understand the dangers of fentanyl and other illicit drugs. For guidance, parents can visit the [Parent Talk Kit](#).

For information on addiction treatment and overdose prevention, contact your health care provider, local pharmacist, or Mercy Medical Center Bridge Program at 530-225-7512. Fentanyl test strips and Naloxone (medication for opioid overdose emergencies) are available at Shasta County Public Health during Syringe Services Program times, 530-225-5591. If overdose is suspected, call 911.

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